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VOLUME XII

JULY, 1915

NUMBER 3

STUDIES IN PHILOLOGY

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL PUBLISHED UNDER THE
DIRECTION OF THE

PHILOLOGICAL CLUB OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

The “Act Time” in Elizabethan Theatres

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PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY

THE "ACT TIME" IN ELIZABETHAN THEATRES

After reading the recent treatises of Lawrence¹ and Neuendorff² regarding entr'actes of Elizabethan drama, one is surprised to find that the evidence marshalled by these writers has not exploded forever the theory that performances unbroken by the "act time," or act-intermission, were a regular feature of the theatres during Shakspere's days. But certain exponents of so-called alternation staging cling doggedly to an idea which seems to bolster their much-vexed theory. Chief among these, perhaps, is Professor Brandl, who has recently attempted a refutation³ of the arguments advanced by Lawrence and Neuendorff.

The mistaken notion of continuous performances has not only been used to support a theory of staging which must be abandoned, or at least vitally modified. Worse than this, it has apparently led some to believe that no less a person than Shakspere was so accustomed to these performances unbroken by act-intervals that he deliberately ignored the matter of act-divisions in the composition of his dramas. Only a few months ago, to illustrate, we had from such a well-known writer as Professor Brander Matthews, the following extremely inaccurate and misleading passage: "We have been taught to suppose that Shakspere chopped up his plays into a tumultuous sequence of changing scenes. But it is more than doubtful whether he himself conceived any of his plays (except possibly half a dozen) in the five-act form; and it is certain that he did not himself imagine them as separated into a host of episodes, each of which took place in a separate spot. In the folio of 1623, which seems to be the earliest text derived from Shakspere's own manuscripts, only seventeen out of the thirty-seven plays are divided into five acts; and in no one of the quartos published in his lifetime, and conforming to the actual performance more or less closely, is there warrant for any splitting up of the play into a heterogeneity of scenes such as annoys us in almost every modern edition. For this division into acts and this subdivision into scenes we are indebted to the mistaken zeal of Rowe."⁴

¹ *Elizabethan Playhouse and Other Studies*, I, pp. 75-96.

² *Englische Volksbühne im Zeitalter Shakespeares*, pp. 178 ff.

³ *Archiv für das Studium der neuern Sprache u. Litt.*, April 1911, pp. 241-48.

⁴ *Shakspere as a Playwright*, p. 20.

Now it is my object in the present paper to show the weakness of the arguments for continuous performances as advanced by Professor Brandl especially, and to accumulate evidence⁵ sufficient, I think, to establish beyond all reasonable doubt that the "five-act form" with regular act-intermissions was the rule in the London theatres throughout the Elizabethan period; and while it may be admitted that semi-continuous or quasi-continuous performances—that is, performances broken by only one or two act-intermissions—were sometimes resorted to, they were a rarer exception, I think, than even Lawrence is inclined to believe.⁶

I. DURATION OF PERFORMANCE

One of the arguments for continuous performances, especially in the public theatres, is that "the two hours' traffic of the stage" was too brief a period to permit act-intermissions. This, we are told, is especially true of the longer plays of the period. Such an argument has arisen in consequence of a too literal interpretation of various obvious understatements by Elizabethans and the mistaken notion that public theatres, since they were entirely dependent on natural light, were compelled to begin their performances early enough and present them rapidly enough to avoid the coming of darkness.

It is somewhat surprising that certain scholars are willing to accept at their face value the various statements by Elizabethans that the stage presentation of plays occupied only two hours. That there were a few plays condensed to the two-hour limit may be admitted. It is possible, for example, that *George-a-Greene* and the first quarto editions of *Merry Wives*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Henry V* are based ultimately on such shortened versions; but if one will take the trouble to read aloud an Elizabethan play of average length, one will find that the mere reading will require almost the full two hours. Are we to suppose that a large number of these printed plays of average length contains material that was "never spoke," as the quarto of Jonson's *Every Man Out* has it? Again, it will be noted that in prac-

⁵ I have, of course, used a good deal of evidence that Lawrence and Neuendorff have already cited in this connection. Cowling's *Music on the Shakespearian Stage*, which one would naturally think of value, is so general and inadequate in the discussion of the entr'acte as to be of little service.

⁶ *Eiz. Playhouse*, I, 86-88. Lawrence, to illustrate, cites as probable examples of semi-continuous plays *Histriomastix* and *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*.

tically all, if not all, of the references to "two hours' traffic of the stage" there are good reasons why the writer should use the minimum round number in speaking of plays that lasted less than the full three hours. Some of these references to time are obvious apologetic understatements:

"The stubborne author of the trifle crime
That just now cheated you of two hours' time"
(Epilogue to *The Scholars*.)

"If all my powers
Can win the grace of two poor hours"
(Chorus to I of *Mayor of Queenborough*.)

Others are artistic promises in order to mislead those who, as Glapthorne puts it,

"for shortnesse force the Author run,
And end his Play before his Plot be done."

Note the following:

"I'll fetch you off, and two hours hence you may
(If not before) laugh at the plot and play"
(Prologue to *The Brothers*.)

"But, good or bad, have patience but two hours"
(Prologue to *The Duke's Mistress*.)

"I'll undertake may see away their shilling in two short hours"
(Prologue to *Henry VIII*.)

"You shall hear
Scenes, though below his art, may yet appear
Worth two hours' travel"
(Prologue to *Two Noble Kinsmen*.)

Similar to the examples above are the "battle will be ended in two hours," "two hours' traffic of the stage," "a good tale told in two hours," "in two hours be given you here," "these two short hours," in the prologues of *The Doubtful Heir*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Pilgrimage*, *The Unfortunate Lovers*, and *The Alchemist* respectively.

Understatement for the purpose of compliment is apparent in Sir Aston Cokayne's verses on Randolph's *Muses' Looking Glass*:

"And if his eyes and ears are worth thine ore,
Learn more in two hours than two years before."

Equally clear is the exaggeration in Crosse's *Vertues Commonwealth* (Ed. Grosart, p. 120) for the purpose of satire, where the author speaks of dramas which with "great allacritie" "swiftly runne over in two hours space, the doings of many yeares, galloping from one country to another." Crosse is echoing Sir Philip Sidney's assertion

that romantic plays carry two young princes through two generations of absurdity in "two hours space."⁷ And Sidney in turn is improving upon Whetstone's accusation that the English playwright "fyrst groundes his worke on impossibilities; then in three houres ronnes he throwe the worlde, marryes, gets Children, makes Children men," etc.⁸

Surely in all the cases above we are no more justified in thinking that dramatists are speaking with precision than we are in believing that Wright in 1699⁹ intended to be accurate when he asserted that in the "good old days" many substantial Englishmen thought dramas "an innocent diversion for an idle hour or two," or that Lamb is scientifically exact when in his essay on artificial comedy he refers to seeing "a stage libertine playing his loose pranks of two hours' duration." In all instances the dramatists could conscientiously use the indefinite "two hours" to refer to a performance that actually endured any time less than the full three hours.

To be taken more seriously, perhaps, is the passage in Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1607), written for the Children of Paul's: "But, gentlemen, to spread myself open unto you, in cheaper terms I salute you; for ours have but six penny fees all the year long; yet we despatch you in two hours, without demur; your suits hang not long here after candles be lighted." This passage is clear when compared with the frequently quoted "Note to the Master of the Children of Powles" found at the end of William Percy's *Necromantes*:

"Memorandum, that if any of the fine and formost of these Pastoralls and comedyes conteyned in this volume, shall but overreach in length (the children not to begin before four, after prayers, and the gates of Powles shutting at six) the tyme of supper, that then in tyme and place convenient, you do let passe some of the songs, and make the consort the shorter; for I suppose these plaiers be somewhat too long for that place."¹⁰

There were special reasons, then, why the performances should be shortened at Paul's, but there is no reason for believing that similar conditions obtained at other playing-places. The passages just quoted, indeed, argue that other theatres did not dispatch the audience in two hours. And it should also be noted here that even the

⁷ *Defense of Poesie*, Ed. Arber, p. 64.

⁸ Smith, *Eliz. Critical Essays*, I. 59.

⁹ *Historia Histrionica*, p. 407.

¹⁰ Quoted by Lawrence, *Studies*, I, 83.

shortened plays by the Children of Paul's did not do away with the "act time"; the actors merely shortened the inter-act "consort." This is proved by Percy's words above and by Middleton's *Phoenix*. This drama was published in the same year with *Michaelmas Term*, which promises to dispatch the audience in two hours, and it was acted by the Children of Paul's; yet this very production calls for inter-act music.

There are other reasons why the loose references to the "two hours' traffic of the stage" cannot be taken too seriously. The old stereotyped expression was carried over into the Restoration, when painted scenery and inter-act music must surely have necessitated considerably more than two hours for presentation. The expression, for instance, occurs in the prologue to Davenant's *Playhouse to Be Let* and in the post-Restoration prologue to his *Unfortunate Lovers*. Dryden, too, in his *Defense of Dramatic Poesy* has one remark on the absurdity of crowding twenty-four or even five hours into "two hours" on the stage; but, speaking more accurately elsewhere in the same production, he refers to "those three hours, more or less, in the space of which the play is represented." Again, we have several references¹¹ to three hours as the duration of Elizabethan plays, which, in their printed form at least, are no longer than those claiming to have occupied only two hours of the spectators' time.¹² We also have various general references to three hours as the normal duration of performances. Especially should the statement of Shirley in "To the Reader" prefaced to the Beaumont and Fletcher folio be considered in connection with the references to two hours in the Blackfriars plays cited above.¹³ Speaking of the folio volume, he says that it contains "the authentic wit that made Blackfriars an academy, where the three hours' spectacle, while Beaumont and

¹¹ Cf. Epilogues to *Loyal Subject, If It Be Not Good* and *The Guardian* (a court play), and prologue to *The Lover's Progress*, etc.

¹² Of course, it might be argued that the "two hours" plays have come down to us in expanded form. If we are to believe the reference to two hours in the prologue to the exceptionally long *Ram-Alley*, then the acted version of this particular production must have been cut extensively. That some plays were shortened for acting purposes is, of course, quite true. Cf. for example, the statement in the introductory remarks to the folio edition of Beaumont and Fletcher that the printed plays contain certain passages omitted by the actors "as occasion led them."

¹³ *Mayor of Queenborough, Two Noble Kinsmen, The Doubtful Heir* (also *Globe*), *Love's Pilgrimage*.

Fletcher were present, were usually of more advantage to the hopeful young heir, than a costly, dangerous, foreign travel."¹⁴

Of more interest is an incident which reveals conditions in the public playing-places. In 1594, Lord Hunsdon, as a special inducement to the authorities of London to allow performances at the Cross Keys, promised that the players would begin "at two and have done between four and five." It is to be noted that even under such circumstances as these, when actors were willing to begin their performances an hour earlier than the usual time, and when they were surely willing also to present their plays more rapidly than under ordinary conditions, their patron was unwilling to restrict them to the "two short hours" of sundry prologues.

But let us admit for the sake of argument that all the references above to two hours as the time occupied by a play are essentially accurate. Even then such references are worthless in determining whether there were or were not act-intermissions. It need only be pointed out that most of these references occur in plays acted at private theatres, where entr'actes as a regular practice can be proved beyond a doubt. And even in plays said to be acted in two hours we have conclusive evidence that these very performances observed the "act time." The plays of Percy and Middleton written for Paul's have already been cited in this connection. The prologues to Shirley's *Brothers* and *The Duke's Mistress* promise to occupy only two hours of the audience's time, still inter-act music was employed in these dramas, as is proved by the words of Luys at the end of the second act of the first play and the situation at the beginning of IV, i, of the second. I have already referred to Restoration allusions to two hours; and act-intermissions were surely a regular practice in the theatres of Dryden's time.

II. THE HOUR OF PERFORMANCE

Equally erroneous is the idea that the public theatres were dependent upon natural light, and consequently were obliged to finish their performances before the coming of dark. Such an idea has apparently

¹⁴ For other general references to three hours, see *Lady Alimony*, I, 2, Whetstone's preface to *Promos and Cassandra*. Fenton in 1574 wrote that plays lasted two or three hours (Symmes, *Critique Dramatique*, p. 231). Northbrooke in 1577 used a similar expression. Perhaps it is worth while to record that Prynne (p. 306), citing Latin authority, says that "stage-plays" last "some three or four hours at the least." At court and university they sometimes lasted longer than four hours.

influenced some in believing that performances in the open houses, especially in winter, must have begun as early as one o'clock in the afternoon. But apparently there is not a tittle of evidence to indicate that such an early hour was ever customary in the Elizabethan theatres. To be sure, the door was opened early; and we find Davenant in the prologue to his *Unfortunate Lovers* informing the audience that its ancestors

"to th' Theatre would come
Ere they had din'd, to take up the best room."¹⁵

On Sunday and holidays this early admission of spectators called forth various objections from the more religiously inclined. On April 13, 1582, to illustrate, the Mayor wrote to the Privy Council: "ffor thoughe they beginne not their playes till after euening prayer, yet all the time of the afternone before they take in hearers and fill the place with such as be therby absent from seruing God at Chirch."¹⁶ It was the early arrival of Society in coaches that the citizens of Blackfriars objected to about 1619¹⁷: "Theise inconveniences fallinge out almost everie daie in the winter tyme (not forbearinge the time of Lent) from one or twoe of the clock till sixe att night," etc. And it is to this same practice that Davies refers (Epigram 39)—a passage which Malone cited as evidence for plays starting at one o'clock:

"He goes to Gyls, where he doth eate till one,
Then sees a play til sixe, and sups at seauen."

In short, there is every reason to believe that, as Collier argued, the regular hour for starting plays in both private and public theatres was three o'clock;¹⁸ and it was not a question of dismissing the audi-

¹⁵ From ca. 1660-1669 the doors of the theatres were thrown open at about twelve o'clock (Lowe, *Thomas Betterton*, pp. 16-17), but plays did not begin until three or later. This early opening of the doors seems to be the survival of a pre-Restoration custom.

¹⁶ Malone Society, *Collections*, I, i, p. 54. Cf. also I, 2, pp. 171, 177.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, i, p. 92.

¹⁸ For evidence pointing to three o'clock as the regular time of performance, see Collier *Annals*, III, 378. Note, too, that in June, 1579, Burbage "about twoe of the clock" was arrested on his way to a play at the Cross Keys (Wallace, *First London Theatre*, pp. 83, 90). For evidence that plays at the Red Bull and Curtain must have begun later than one o'clock, see *Jack Dawes Prognostication* (1623), where the author states that if at these theatres "about the hours of foure and five it waxe cloudy, and then raine downright, they shall sit dryer in the galleries then those who are the understanding men in the yard" (Halliwell-Phillips, *Outlines*, 9th Ed., I, 372). It will be remembered that Holinshed in his chronicle, describing the earthquake of April 6, 1580, says that it occurred "about six of the clock" and disturbed considerably the people who were in the playhouses "in the fields."

ence before darkness fell but of letting it out in time to eat supper at a convenient hour.¹⁹

Of course, certain performances in the regular playhouses began later than three o'clock. Percy's reference to performances beginning at Paul's at four o'clock after prayers speaks for certain plays in private playing-places. About 1594 the players of Lord Hunsdon were beginning²⁰ their performances "towards fower a clock." Sometimes dramas that ordinarily began at three were delayed, as is brought out in I, ii and iv of *Lady Alimony*. The Blackfriars performance referred to in *The Parson's Wedding* (IV, i) must have begun late or else been an especially long one; since Jolly, who has been sent for the musicians, enters after the parson has gone to bed and gives as an excuse for his lateness: "Yes, I have got the Blackfriars music. I was fain to stay till the last act."

Now when we consider in connection with what precedes the fact that night performances were sometimes given in the London theatres²¹—public as well as private—we see the frailty of an argument which holds that players were wont to rush through a performance and to omit inter-act attractions because they were dependent upon the uncertain daylight of London. To be sure, they began certain performances before three o'clock; we have seen that Lord Hunsdon as a special inducement to the city offered to have his players begin at two, but this has nothing to do with lighting facilities in the public theatres and just as little to do with the hour of performance at those playhouses which were situated outside the jurisdiction of the mayor and his brethren.

III. INTER-ACT ATTRACTIONS

The "Act Time." Another argument advanced by exponents of continuous performances is that stage directions indicative of inter-act pauses are infrequent. It is quite true that such directions are comparatively infrequent; they are just the sort of directions that would naturally be omitted in the normally printed Elizabethan play.

¹⁹ In the latter half of the 16th century the nobility, gentry and students were accustomed to eat supper between five and six; the London merchants ate at six; the husbandmen at seven or eight (*Antiquarian Repertory*, III, 186). A few passages which indicate that the audience went directly to supper from the theatre are Glapthorne's *Wit in a Constable* (Ed. Pearson, II, 191), Fitzgeoffrey's *Notes from Black-Fryers*, Field's *Amends for Ladies* (III, iv), *The Parson's Wedding* (III, i).

²⁰ *Englische Studien*, 47, pp. 66-67.

²¹ *Ibid.* See also Lawrence in *Eng. Stud.*, 48, 213-30. In a reply to Mr. Lawrence, which I hope to publish soon, I shall discuss at considerable length the matter of night performances in the Elizabethan period.

It may be noted in this connection that specific directions for the use of a stage curtain are also comparatively rare in similar texts; yet the alternationists who argue for continuous performances are not averse to drawing a curtain constantly without the printed instructions of the Elizabethans.

Let us prove that stage directions indicating act-intermissions were frequently omitted in printed plays. There is no direction for music at the end of the second act of *Gammer Gurton*, yet Diccon's "felowes, pipe upp" proves inter-act music; in Yarrington's *Two Tragedies in One* there is no direction for music at the end of the second act, but the words of Truth—"Delight your eares with pleasing harmonie"—settles the matter; there is no direction for music at the beginning of the second act of Shirley's *Politician*, yet the situation at the beginning of that act proves that music was employed; there is no direction for music at the end of the second act of Shirley's *Brothers*, still as Luys leaves the stage he remarks, "Now, fiddles, do your worst." Similar instances may be cited. The absence, then, of specific stage directions calling for inter-act music is no valid argument against what was, as will be shown later, an extremely common practice in both private and public Elizabethan theatres.

Now for the evidence, which is by no means so scanty as Professor Brandl would believe, for the regular observance of the "act time" in the playhouses of Shakspeare's time. In the first place, let us cite evidence which indicates act-intermission without specifying how the "act time" was utilized by the performers. Here fall Jonson's reference to "gossips that tattle between the acts" (Preface to *Staple of News*), his protest against the unappreciative who "rose between the acts in oblique lines" (Preface to *New Inn*), and his frequently quoted lines in *The Devil Is an Ass* (I, iii):

"To-day I go to the Blackfriars play-house,
Sit in the view, salute all my acquaintance,
Rise up between the acts."

These are all references to the private houses. But why restrict to private theatres the words in III, i, of the last mentioned play, where a character is requested to remain at the playhouse at least one act, instead of leaving during the action "to vex the players and to punish their poet"? Such behavior would have been as vexing to players on the public stage as to those in the private houses. Nor is there

any especial reason to think that Cowley had in mind only the private theatre when he wrote in *Love's Riddle* (III, i):

"Twould doe you much more credit at the Theatre,
To rise betwixt the Acts, and looke about
The boxes, and then cry, God save you Madame."

Again, Lawrence²² has given much reason for thinking that the gatherers were accustomed to collect money from the galleries during the act-intermissions. And he also cites a Restoration practice which seems to be a survival of a pre-Restoration habit on the part of some to enter the theatres free of charge during the intermission following the third or fourth act. So common was this practice during the Restoration that in 1663 a royal warrant forbade such behavior "notwithstanding theire pretended privilegde by custom of forcing theire entrance at the fourth or fifth acts without payment"; and in 1670 a more severe proclamation prohibited any such action "by any pretended usage of an entrance at the fifth act."²³

Pre-Restoration instances of this "pretended usage" are extant. Brathwaite, in describing a ruffian,²⁴ writes: "To a play they wil hazard to go, though with never a rag of money: where after the second act, when the doore is weakly guarded, they will make forcible entrie; a knock with a cudgell as the worst; whereat though they grumble, they rest pacified upon their admittance. Forthwith, by violent assault and assent, they aspire to the two-pennie roome; where being furnished with tinder, match, and a portion of decayed Barmoodas, they smoake it most terribly, applaud a prophane jeast", etc.²⁵ Apparently the following from Cowley's *The Guardian* (III, i) is a reference to the "privilege of the fifth act": "Be abandon'd by all men above a Tapster; and not dare to looke a Gentleman i' the face; unless perhaps you sneake into a Play-house, at the fifth act." More interesting is a passage from Davenant's *Long Vacation in London*:

"Then forth he steales; to Globe does run;
And smiles, and vowed Four Acts are done:
Finis to bring he does protest,
Tells ev'ry Play'r, his part is best."

²² *Eliz. Playhouse and Other Studies*, II, 95 ff.

²³ *Eliz. Playhouse and Other Studies*, II, pp. 102-104.

²⁴ *Whimzies*, Ed. Halliwell, p. 84.

²⁵ Lowe (*Thomas Betterton*, p. 24) says that forced entrance to theatres is a sort of swindling peculiar to the Restoration. He is clearly mistaken, as Brathwaite's words show. For cases of a similar thing in Norwich, in 1583, see Murray, *Eng. Dramatic Companies*, I, 8-9. For the frequency of the practice at an early date in Spain, see Rennert's *The Spanish Stage*, pp. 125 ff.

The passages above, of course, do not necessarily refer to act-intermissions, but they imply them; and they at least argue strongly that the acts were clearly marked off at the Globe and elsewhere. This, as we shall see later, is of significance in refuting another argument that has been put forth by exponents of continuous performances. Other rather indefinite indications of act-intervals are such directions as that found before the end of the second act of *The Maid in the Mill* (printed 1623, as acted at the Globe): "Six chaires placed at the arras." Surely this points to the arrangement of properties during the entr'acte which follows. A similar direction occurs at the beginning of the fifth act of *The Cruel Brother*.

Finally, a word may be said about Prölss' "Law of Re-entry" as it bears upon the matter of act-intermissions. Briefly the law²⁶ is this: Characters leaving the stage at the end of a scene to reappear at another locality are, to avoid confusion, not permitted to re-enter immediately; hence, thinks Prölss, small transition scenes were frequently inserted between the exit and re-enter of such characters. At least it should be noted in this connection that numerous cases can be cited²⁷ where characters leave the stage at the *end of an act* and re-enter at an entirely different locality at the very beginning of the next act. Surely, if there is anything in the contention of Prölss, such a practice would have been confusing to the audience, unless we assume in such cases at least a brief "act time," undenoted though it be by stage directions.

Now let us consider evidence which designates just how the act-interval was utilized by the actors. We shall confine ourselves in the discussion largely to the public theatres, since entr'actes in the private theatres are generally admitted.

Inter-act "Shows." Dumb shows and the chorus were means of filling in the "act time" in public theatres; and Hamlet's objection (III, 2) that the groundlings were incapable, for the most part, of anything but "inexplicable dumb shows and noise" attests the

²⁶ Prölss, *Alttesten Drucken, etc.*, pp. 107 ff., Neuendorff, p. 192.

²⁷ It is needless to pile up examples. Frequent cases, for example, occur in the dramas of Shirley, Beaumont and Fletcher.

popularity and frequency of the former device.²⁸ The inter-act performance of characters who figure in the induction may also be mentioned as a means of occupying intermissions.²⁹ "Shows" other than dumb shows were apparently sometimes thrust into the entr'actes. At least Taylor in his *Revenge*³⁰ states that, when in October, 1614, Fennor did not keep his engagement for a wit contest at the Hope, the former entertained the audience before the performance of the actors and also, apparently, between acts. Taylor's words may mean that he performed before and after the play; yet, when they are considered in connection with the words of Fennor's reply (p. 152) the first interpretation seems preferable. And at a time when extemporal clownage was so very common, it is certainly probable that such persons as Tarleton and Kempe, instead of being confined to the "jig" after the play, were allowed to entertain the audience during the "act time," just as on the early German stage Pickle-herring was accustomed to make his appearance between the acts.³¹

Whether the regular "jig" was ever given between acts on the Elizabethan stage I do not know. Inter-act "jigs" were fairly common in Germany, some of the plays containing "zwischenspielen" being presented by English comedians. This certainly implies their existence in England. Malone, indeed,³² speaks of the "jigs" in England used "between the acts and after the play," and he thinks that such entertainments originated in the "satirical enterludes" of Greece and the "atellans and mimes of the Roman stage." But the only evidence for inter-act jigs cited by him, a passage from the prologue to Davenant's *Wits*, is by no means conclusive:

"So country jigs and farces, mixt among
Heroic scenes, make plays continue long."

²⁸ On dumb shows see Foster, "Dumb Shows in Elizabethan Drama before 1620" in *Eng. Studien*, 44, 8-17. Perhaps it should be mentioned that the Elizabethans could cite good classic precedent for such extraneous features. Puttenham (Smith, *Eliz. Critical Essays*, II, 28), for instance, speaks of the "Pantomimi" between acts of the ancient drama; and Prynne (p. 408) has the following marginal comment on "a swimming whore": "It seems by this that the Graecian Actors, did now and then to refresh and exhilarate their lascivious Spectators, bring a kinde of Cisterne upon the Stage, wherein naked Whores did swim, and bathe themselves between their Acts and Scenes."

²⁹ Cf. for example, *Soliman and Perseda*, *Taming of a Shrew*, *Old Wives Tale* (?). For private theatres see *Knight of Burning Pestle* and several of Jonson's plays.

³⁰ Spenser Society, p. 145.

³¹ Mauermann, *Die Bühnenanweisungen im deutschen Drama bis 1700*, p. 109. Miss Sheavyn (*Literary Profession in Eliz. Age*, p. 204) refers to inter-act clownage, citing a passage from one of Hall's satires. The passage, however, is not conclusive evidence.

³² Ed. of Shakspere (1790), Vol. I, pt. 2, pp. 116-117. Miss Sheavyn (p. 204) speaks of inter-act jigs without citing evidence.

There is a passage in Shirley's *The Changes* (IV, 2) that is at least of interest in this connection:

"Oh, sir, what plays are taking now with these
Pretty devices? Many gentlemen
Are not, as in the days of understanding,
Now satisfied without a jig, which since
They cannot, with their honour, call for after
The play, they look to be serv'd up in the middle:
Your dance is the best language of some comedies,
And footing runs away with all."

Shirley and Davenant may have had in mind inter-act jigs, but it is more probable that they were referring solely to jigs incorporated in the play proper. In spite of this fact, however, it is reasonable to believe that, after the order of the General Session of the Peace at Westminster in 1612, forbidding "Jigges, Rymes and Daunces" at the end of plays,³³ the actors would be inclined to insert such features between acts as well as to incorporate them in the drama.

Inter-act Dancing. With the exception of the evidence in *James IV*, printed in 1598 as "sundrie times publikely plaide," there is little to indicate that dancing of a more refined nature was ever introduced between the acts in the public theatres.³⁴ Such dancing, however, was extremely common in private playhouses,³⁵ and in view of the fact that actors in the open theatres were, as we have seen, under no obligation to conclude their performances sooner than those in the roofed houses, it is almost inconceivable that, at a time of such rivalry between the various companies, the inter-act dance of the private theatre would not have been introduced into the public playhouses. It should at least be noted that more than one dramatist protested against the popular insistence on dances and such-like "trumpery" in drama;³⁶ and that Prynne is very positive, if also very indefinite, regarding the prevalence of dancing in plays. "Stage-playes are," he exclaims, "commonly attended with mixt effeminate amorous dancing; it is most apparent; not only by our owne moderne experiance," but also by classic authority.³⁷ And he concludes his section by affirming "that dancing was alwayes heretofore, and yet continues

³³ Murray, *Eng. Dram. Companies*, I, 210. Cf. also, in connection with this order and the words of Shirley above, *The Lady Mother*, II, i.

³⁴ Possibly *Two Italian Gentlemen*, which has inter-act dances, was presented in a public theatre. At the end of III of Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland*, acted in the Dublin theatre, we have: "Bears her in, while Spirits are seen rejoicing in a dance." Was the Dublin theatre of the private sort?

³⁵ Lawrence, *Studies*, I, 82-83; Wallace, *Children of Blackfriars*, *passim*.

³⁶ See, e. g., "To the Reader" prefaced to *Alchemist*, Heywood's *Love's Mistress*, W. B.'s. verses on *The Bondman*, prologue (for Globe) to *The Doubtful Heir*, *The Changes*, IV, 2.

³⁷ *Histrionastix*, p. 259.

an unseparable concomitant, if not a necessary part of Stage-playes." If dances were such a popular feature among the groundlings, it is surely probable that they sometimes occupied the "act time" of the public theatres.

Inter-act Songs. The matter of inter-act songs is closely related to that of inter-act dancing; and, as was true in the case of dancing, there is little extant evidence which indicates inter-act songs on the public stages, popular as they were in the private theatres. One interesting indication of songs between acts in the open playhouses may be mentioned. At about line 620 of Peele's *Old Wives Tale*, which is thought to have been acted at a public theatre, we have a song by the harvesters. This particular play is not divided into acts, but in view of the general practice of having the characters of the induction perform at the end of acts in dramas employing the device of the induction, we may reasonably infer that the words of Frolic and Madge immediately preceding the song of the harvesters indicate an act division and that the song, which has little or nothing to do with the play itself, is an inter-act intrusion. In connection with this indication of inter-act song, uncertain as it is, should be considered the words of Prynne (p. 262). Arguing that "stage plays are usually accompanied with such Pastorals, Songs, and Ditties," he writes:

"First, by our owne moderne experience, there being nothing more frequent, in all our Stage-playes (as all our Play-haunters can abundantly testifie;) then amorous Pastorals, or obscene lascivious Love-songs, most melodiously chanted out upon the Stage betweene each several action; both to supply that Chasme or vacant Interim which the Tyring-house takes up, in changing the Actors robes, to fit them for some other part in the ensuing Scene: (a thing in use in Ancient times, as Horace, Livy, and sundry others have recorded;) as likewise to please the itching eares, if not to inflame the outragious lusts of lewde spectators."

This is definite, clear-cut, spoken with assurance; and under the circumstances one is justified in accepting Prynne's "nothing more frequent, in all our Stage-Playes" as evidence for the public as well as private theatres.

Before passing from the topic of inter-act song, it is well to discuss Busino's statement in the winter of 1617 that he was conducted by members of the Venetian Embassy "to one of the many theatres where plays are performed," and that here he saw a "tragedy" which did not please him greatly, "though some little amusement," he continues, "may be derived from gazing at the very costly dresses

of the actors, and from the various interludes of instrumental music and dancing and singing; but the best treat was to see such a crowd of nobility so well arrayed that they looked like so many princes."³⁸ It was formerly said that the performance witnessed by Busino took place at the Fortune; and recently we have Cowling preserving this statement.³⁹ Lawrence, too, was, as he puts it,⁴⁰ seriously led astray by the statements of others; and on learning that there is no evidence for assigning definitely Busino's experience to the Fortune, concludes, "from the quality of the audience," that the play "probably took place at a private theatre." It seems to me, however, that neither what Busino says of the audience nor the season in which his experience took place necessarily points to a private theatre. The Venetian ambassador in the very season of Busino's visit to the theatre wrote regarding English playhouses and audiences in general: "Hence in London, as the capital of a most flourishing kingdom, theatrical representations without end prevail throughout the year in various parts of the city, and are invariably frequented by crowds of persons devoted to pleasure who, for the most part dress grandly and in colours, so that they seem, were it possible, more than princes, or rather comedians."⁴¹ It must be kept in mind, too, in connection with Busino's account, that foreign ambassadors and their trains frequently attended the London public theatres,⁴² that such events were considered above the ordinary,⁴³ and that consequently on such occasions the quality and costume of the audience would tend to be considerably superior to those of ordinary days. The experience of Busino, then, may have occurred in a public theatre.

Inter-act Music. Fortunately large and conclusive evidence is at hand to prove the frequency of inter-act music, which may or may not

³⁸ Quoted in Furnivall's Ed. of Harrison's *Desc. of England*, I, pp. 55*-56*, *Quarterly Review*, vol. 102, p. 416.

³⁹ *Music on Shakespearian Stage*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Studies*, I, p. 81 note.

⁴¹ *Cal. State Papers, Venetian*, 1617-19, p. 110.

⁴² In July 1621, to illustrate, the Spanish ambassador "with his whole traine" went to "a common play at the Fortune" (Murray, *Eng. Dram. Cos.*, I, 213); Guistinian, the Venetian ambassador, paid more than twenty crowns for a special performance of "Pericles," probably at the Globe (*Cal. State Papers, Venetian* 1615-17, p. 600); in 1617 an Italian testified that "all the ambassadors who have come to England have gone to the play more or less" (*ibid.*).

⁴³ Dekker (*Seven Deadly Sinnes of London*, Ed. Arber, pp. 32-33) refers to the gain to the actors occasioned by visits of the ambassadors. Sloth's repairing to the theatres, he says, would so enlarge the audience that "the comming of tenne Embassadors was never so sweete to them" [players].

have accompanied songs and dances. Indications of music during the "act time" are fairly frequent for all the private houses with the exception of the Whitefriars.⁴⁴ The idea that inter-act music was not common at the public playhouses is due to an underestimate of the emphasis placed upon music by the early adult companies and a misunderstanding of a passage in Webster's induction to Marston's *Malcontent*. Professor C. W. Wallace, who was engaged in showing the tremendous influence exerted upon drama by the Chapel Children at the Blackfriars,⁴⁵ wrote as follows: "The latter [public theatres] had at the close of Elizabeth and beginning of James almost no music. In the plays of the children-companies music is a prominent part of the performance,—more at Blackfriars and Paul's under Elizabeth, as noted before, than at the same or other theatres under James."⁴⁶ And again (p. 10): "The public theatres had not yet in 1604 adopted the music introductions and interspersions of the private house." Professor Wallace's manipulation of evidence has apparently misled so sane a scholar as W. J. Lawrence, who seems inclined to underestimate the frequency and importance of music in the public theatres.⁴⁷

As a matter of fact music was an important asset of the adult companies during Elizabeth's reign. This is merely one of the various ways in which court practice influenced the public theatres at an early date. Cowling has pointed out⁴⁸ that Henslowe's company at the Rose was well provided with musicians and musical instruments. The companies that toured the provinces were provided with musicians; and the records as collected by Murray⁴⁹ certainly indicate that these musicians did more than merely advertise the plays by means of

⁴⁴ *Knight of the Burning Pestle* is usually cited to prove inter-act music at the Whitefriars, but it was probably acted at the Blackfriars (cf. E. K. Chambers in *Mod. Lang. Review*, IV, 160-61).

For inter-act music at the Blackfriars, see *Sophonisba*, *Fawn*, *The Brothers*, *The City Madam*, *The Fatal Dowry*. For Salisbury Court see *The Changeling* and Shirley's *Politician* (II, i). For Paul's see Percy plays and *Phoenix*; for *Phoenix* see *The Witty Fair One* and *The Changeling*; for Cockpit see Nabbe's *Hannibal and Scipio*. For late court plays see end of act 2 of Cartwright's *The Seide*.

⁴⁵ He says (*Children of Chapel at Blackfriars*, p. 9) that "our present orchestral *interludia* between acts" can be traced directly to the chapel boys at the (second) Blackfriars. Inter-act music, however, is earlier than the second Blackfriars, as shown by *Gammer Gurton*, perhaps by Yarrington's *Two Plays in One*, and by *Wars of Cyrus* (printed 1594 as played by Children of Her Majesty's Chapel), where at line 367 occurs the direction, "Musick. Finis Actus primi." I should say that it would be more reasonable to trace inter-act music directly to the music accompanying the dumb shows in early court plays, as for example, *Gorboduc*, *Jocasta*, *Tancred and Gismunda*.

⁴⁶ *Children of Chapel*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Studies*, I, 75-84.

⁴⁸ *Music on Sh. Stage*, pp. 34, 82.

⁴⁹ *Eng. Dramatic Companies*, II, pp. 121, 198, 229, 234, 238, 265, 375.

drum and trumpet. In Ratsey's "pretty prancke" (S. R., 1605) played upon traveling actors, the hero says to the comedians: "I pray you let me heare your musicke, for I have often gone to plaies more for musicke sake then for action."⁵⁰ Surely Gosson in his *School of Abuse*⁵¹ (1579) is not referring to the early Blackfriars when he objects to the "straunge consortes of melody" introduced into the theatre "to tickle the eare"; and he is more specific in his *Apologie*, when he says that he is not objecting to music in itself but to bringing the "cunning" of musicians into theatres: "Yet do I not forbidde our new founde instruments, so that we handle them as David did, to prayse God; nor bring them any more into publique Theatres, to please wantons." Again, in his *Plays Confuted*⁵² he continues to object to music in theatres: "As the Divell hath brought in all that Poetrie can sing so hath hee sought out every streine that musicke is able to pipe, and drawe all kind of instruments into that compasse, simple and mixte." These are surely no references to drum and tabor. And that he was not speaking of music in connection with jigs at the end of plays but to interspersed music—"consort" melody "before the entrance," etc.—is revealed by Lodge's reply to the Puritan. "Those instrumentes," writes Lodge,⁵³ "which you mislike in playes grow of auncient custome, for, when Roscius was an Actor, be sure that as with his tears he moued affections, so the Musitian in the Theater before the entrance did mornefully record it in melody (as Seruius reporteth)." Stubbes in his *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) implies that music was being used in the London theatres to the detriment of the citizens (Ed. Furnivall, p. 143). And finally may be cited the situation in the induction to Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (Blackfriars, 1600), where the critical gallant, opposed to the "rascally tits," objects among other things that "their music is abominable—able to stretch a man's ears worse than ten-pillories, and their ditties—most lamentable things." Does this not imply that the gallant preferred a different type of music and song as furnished by those actors who were not "tit"? And is the evi-

⁵⁰ Halliwell-Phillips, *Outlines*, 9 Ed., I, 325.

⁵¹ Ed. Arber, pp. 31-32.

⁵² Hazlitt, *Drama and Stage*, p. 192.

⁵³ Smith, *Eliz. Critical Essays*, I, 83.

dence above not sufficient to invalidate the statement that the public theatres "had at the close of Elizabeth and beginning of James almost no music?"

Now let us consider the evidence for inter-act music in the public theatres prior to 1604. The words of Truth, cited above, at the end of the third act of Yarrington's *Two Plays in One*, printed in 1601 but probably acted earlier at the Fortune,⁵⁴ calls for inter-act music. The "platt" of *The Dead Man's Fortune*, prepared for the Rose, undoubtedly calls for inter-act music. In the *Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, presented as early as ca. 1600⁵⁵ and printed in 1659 "as it was divers times publickly acted by the Princes Servants," we find the direction "Musick" at the end of the second, third, and fourth acts. Jonson's *Sejanus*, generally supposed⁵⁶ to have been acted at the Globe in 1603, employs a "chorus—of Musicians" at the end of each act—a device which Jonson regrets is not "a proper chorus" and which certainly implies inter-act music. As early as 1790 Malone⁵⁷ wrote: "In a copy of *Romeo and Juliet*, 1599, now before me, which certainly belonged to the play-house, the endings of the acts are marked in the margin; and directions are given for musick to be played between each act. The marginal directions in this copy appear to be of a very old date, one of them being in the ancient style and hand—'Play Musicke.' " Professor Wallace dismisses this evidence of Malone as an uncertain and isolated case of inter-act music. It is not isolated, as we have seen; it merely refuses to fit Professor Wallace's theory.

Now for the passage in the induction to *The Malcontent*, the passage that has frequently been employed as the chief evidence against the early use of inter-act music in the public theatres. The passage follows:

"Sly. I wonder you would play it [i. e., *Malcontent*], another company having interest in it.

Condell. Why not Malevole in folio with us, as Jeronimo in decimo-sesto with them? They taught us a name for our play; we call it *One For Another*.

Sly. What are your additions?

Burbage. Sooth, not greatly needful; only as your salad to your great feast, to entertain a little more time, and to abridge the not-received custom of music in our theatre [i. e., the Globe]."

⁵⁴ Fleay, *Biog. Chron.*, II, 285. Law (*Mod. Lang. Review*, V, 167-97) argues that the production was composed as early as ca. 1594.

⁵⁵ Fleay, *Biog. Chron.*, I, 107; Ward, *Eng. Dram. Lit.*, II, 599.

⁵⁶ Murray (*Eng. Dram. Cos.*, I, 148 n.) unconvincingly states that the play was "probably" presented at one of the 1603 performances before the king; hence not at the Globe.

⁵⁷ Ed. of Shakspere, I, pt. 2, p. 93 note.

The "not-received custom of music," believe Wallace, Lawrence, Brandl, and others, refers to inter-act music as well as to other sorts. But the passage above is a clear and unmistakable reference to the fact that the induction had been written to take the place at the *Globe* of the musical prelude which, according to Phillip Julius von Stettin,⁵⁸ occupied, in 1602, "a whole hour before the beginning of the play" at the Blackfriars. It has nothing to do with inter-act music.

Since the matter is of importance in connection with Webster's share in the play as well as with the question of inter-act music, a fuller discussion is in order. Stoll⁵⁹, without using Burbage's evidence above, has already shown beyond all reasonable doubt that Webster's "additions," which were composed for the King's Servants, are confined to the induction. This is exactly what Burbage himself tells us: Somebody (i. e., Webster) wrote additions (the induction) for the *Globe* version of the play stolen in retaliation from the Blackfriars company, additions which were to occupy part, but not all ("abridge"), of the hour formerly devoted to the musical prelude. That Burbage is thinking only of the induction as a substitute for the preliminary music, and not of musical interspersions or additions to the play proper, is clear when we understand the significance of his expression "only as your salad to your great feast." This is his way of saying that the "additions" preceded the play proper; for in his time the French custom, as distinguished from the Spanish,⁶⁰ of eating "sallets" before the more substantial part of "a great feast" predominated in England.⁶¹ The passage, then, in the induction to *The Malcontent* has nothing to do with inter-act music at the *Globe* or elsewhere.

⁵⁸ Stettin's account is quoted by Wallace (*Children of Chapel*, p. 107) and by E. S. Bates in *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 72, p. 115. The original is printed in *Transactions Royal Historical Society*, New Series, VI, 28-29.

⁵⁹ John Webster, pp. 55-57.

⁶⁰ Cf. Jas. Howell's *Instructions for Forraine Travell*, Ed. Arber, p. 32, and John Evelyn's *Acetaria (Miscellaneous Works)*, Ed. Upcott, p. 773.

⁶¹ Note, for example, the following from Jonson's *Inviting a Friend to Supper*:

"Yet shall you have, to rectify your palate,
An olive, capers, or some better sallet
Ushering the mutton."

After Domitia has induced Paris to kiss her (*Roman Actor*, IV, 2), she remarks:

"These are but salads

To sharpen appetite."

Evelyn in his *Acetaria; A Discourse of Sallets* (1699) writes at painful length on his subject. He goes deeply into the history of eating salads, gives the time for eating as practiced by various nations, and recommends the Roman and French custom of eating them at the beginning of the meal (*Miscellaneous Works*, Ed. Upcott, pp. 772-75).

Let us next consider evidence for inter-act music in the public theatres after 1604. In the MS of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, acted by the King's Company, the act-divisions are denoted and the word "Flourish" is written in the margin before acts two and three.⁶² At the end of the second act of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* the music plays, and the citizen calls for "Baloo" while his wife calls for "Lachrymae." This incident is usually cited as evidence that the audiences were accustomed to call for special tunes between the acts at the Whitefriars. But it seems to me more likely that here the dramatist is burlesquing the behavior of citizens at their regular haunts; and citizens such as are represented in this drama were accustomed to attend the public rather than the private houses. *The Actors Remonstrance* of 1643, purporting to come from the actors "belonging to the famous private and public houses within the city of London and the suburbs thereof," is surely not speaking of private theatres alone, when it objects that puppet-plays, "which are not so much valuable as the very music between each act at ours, are still up with uncontrolled allowance."

Various references to inter-act music as a general custom—references which, in view of what precedes, cannot be restricted to private theatres—may be cited. In 1608 Dekker wrote:⁶³ "These were appointed to be my Actes, in this goodly theater, the Musicke betweene, were the Singers of the Wood." Vennor, in 1614, speaking of his unfortunate "England's Joy," promised:⁶⁴ "I heere promise the next tearme, with the true history of my life, to bee *publiquely* [italics mine] presented, to insert, in place of musicke for the actes, all those intendments prepared for that daies entertainment." Sir Walter Raleigh had written:⁶⁵

"What is our life? The play of passion.
Our mirth? The music of division."

⁶² It is probable that the entr'acte was frequently very brief, and that the inter-act "music" was merely a "flourish." The "soundings" before a play are sometimes referred to as "music"; and in IV: 3 of Shirley's *The Constant Maid* the word *music* is used in referring to a "flourish" announcing the approach of certain characters disguised as the king and his lords. Similar uses of the word *music* are extant.

⁶³ Works, Ed. Grosart, III, 76-77.

⁶⁴ Collier, *Illustrations of O. E. Lit.*, III, 10.

⁶⁵ Works, Ed. Hannah, p. 29.

Quarles in his *Divine Fancies*⁶⁶ (1632) imitates Raleigh:

"The World's a Theater: The Earth, a Stage
Plac'd in the midst; wheron both Prince and Page,
Both rich and poore; foole, wiseman, base, and high;
All act their Parts in Life's short Tragedy:
Our Life's a Tragedy; Those secret Roomes
Wherein we tyre us, are our Mothers' Wombes;
The musick ush'ring in the Play, is Mirth⁶⁷
To see a Manchild brought upon the Earth:
That fainting gaspe of Breath which first we vent
Is a Dumb-Shev, presents the Argument:
Our new-born Cries that new-born Griefes betwray,
Is the sad Prologue to th' ensuing Play:
False hopes, true feares, vaine joyes, and fierce distracts,
Are like the musicke that divides the Acts:
Time holds the Glasse, and when the Hour's out-run,
Death strikes the Epilogue; and the Play is done."

Anthony Weldon in his *Court of James I*,⁶⁸ speaking of certain churchmen who blow their own trumpets, remarks that "these were but as musick before every sceane." R. Brathwaite in his *Whim-zies*⁶⁹ (1631) probably, but not necessarily, had the private theatres in mind when he said of the gallant: "Hee seldome ha's time to take ayre, unlesse it be to a play; where if his pockets will give leave, you shall seem aspire to a box: or like the *Silent Woman*, sit demurely upon the stage. Where, at the end of every act, while the encurtain'd musique sounds,⁷⁰ to give enter-breath to the actors, and more grace to their action, casting his cloake carelesly on his left shoulder, hee enters into some complementall discourse with one of his ordinarie gallants."

*Certaine Propositions*⁷¹ (1642), offered to the House of Parliament, ironically suggested that all plays be based on Scripture; and, adds the tract: "It would not be amisse, too, if instead of the Musicke that playes betweene Acts, there were only a Psalme sung for distinction sake."

When we remember, in connection with what precedes, that English comedians acting at Frankfurt in Germany employed inter-

⁶⁶ Works, Ed. Grosart, II, 202.

⁶⁷ This may be a reference to the late survival of the musical prelude described by von Stettin in 1602. More probably it is a reference to the three "soundings" before the play began.

⁶⁸ *Secret History of Court of James I*, Vol. I, p. 438.

⁶⁹ Ed. Halliwell, p. 40.

⁷⁰ With the expression "encurtain'd music" should be compared the description of Davenant's opera of 1656: "The Musick was above in a loouer hole railed about and covered with sarcenetts to conceale them, before each speech was consort music" (Reyher, *Les Masques Anglais*, p. 515).

⁷¹ Hazlitt, *Drama and Stage*, p. xi.

act music,⁷² that early seventeenth century German plays showing directly the influence of the English resorted to inter-act music,⁷³ and that inter-act music was carried over as a regular practice in the Restoration theatres, surely we are not justified in affirming that such a feature was uncommon in pre-Restoration times or that it was confined to private theatres. To be sure, as Professor Brandl remarks, actual stage directions for inter-act music are comparatively rare; yet, as said above, it is entirely natural that they should be so. In spite of this rarity, however, we have for hardly any general custom of Elizabethan theatres such satisfactory evidence as for that of inter-act music.

IV. THE FIVE-ACT FORM

Another argument of the exponents of continuous performances is the fact that the majority of Elizabethan quartos are undivided into acts. Such productions, they would have us believe, are survivals in some way or another of continuous presentation. Such an argument deserves little consideration; for Elizabethan quartos in which the acts are undenoted are worthless as evidence in determining whether dramatists divided their plays into five or a dozen acts. Leaving out of consideration the facts that dramatists had nothing to do with the vast majority of these quartos and that some of them at least were miserably printed—as brought out in the complaints of Heywood and the folio editors—and believing with Pollard that the majority of the early quartos were rather carefully printed, what reason is there for this frequent failure to denote act-divisions? Just this: Such productions were printed to be read, not acted, and to be read somewhat as the short-story is read today; that is, as a continuous story. For this reason the printers felt no more obliged to retain the original act-divisions than we do to split a story into five sections. There was a vast difference between a quarto and the playhouse version of a drama. Is not the absurdity of using a printed quarto for actual theatrical purposes referred to in the scene in Middleton's *Mayor of Queenborough* (V, i), where certain strolling players

⁷² Neuendorff, p. 179.

⁷³ Mauermann, p. 109.

are characterized as mere impostaors who "only take the name of country comedians to abuse simple people with a printed play or two, which they bought at Canterbury for six pence?"

Now let us give evidence to prove that many quartos intentionally failed to mark off the acts. Of the Shakspere quartos printed before 1623, there is, with the exception of the 1597 *Romeo and Juliet*, the 1609 *Pericles*, and the 1622 *Othello*, no attempt to mark any of the acts; yet some of these must surely have been based ultimately on Blackfriars performances. And at this theatre, at least, act-division was imperative in consequence of the regular act-intermission, a feature of this particular playhouse which no one denies. Furthermore, the quarto of *Pericles* does not denote the various acts, but the chorus shows that the play was regularly divided into five acts. The 1607 quarto of Middleton's *Phoenix*, acted at a private theatre, is not divided into acts, still, as Lawrence points out, "the breaks are indicated in the text and shown to have been signified by the playing of music." *Soliman and Perseda* is not divided into acts in the quarto, but the appearance of characters of the induction at regular intervals in the body of the play proves that this production was originally divided. *Old Wives Tale* is probably a similar case. The *Warning for Fair Women* is undivided after the first act in the original version, yet the various dumb shows and the speeches of Tragedy indicate the regular five-act scheme. It is needless to give other instances of this sort of thing.

Also of interest in this connection is another phenomenon. The 1597 quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* has no act or scene division until the end of III: iv, when "each new scene is marked off by a printer's ornament."⁷⁴ Again, the printer of the 1608 *King Lear*, says Pollard,⁷⁵ "frequently leaves a space before a new entrance, and many of these spaces occur where a new scene begins, but there are others where there is no change." Does this not indicate that printers were intentionally avoiding the old playhouse division and theatrical terminology?

Frequently the quartos contain at the beginning of the play only the words "Actus primus. Scaena prima" and give no further indi-

⁷⁴ Pollard, *Sh. Folios and Quartos*, p. 24.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

cations of act and scene divisions. Why should printers frequently have retained this one indication of act-division? In view of what has preceded, is it not reasonable to suppose that they, preparing dramas to be read as stories, were not interested in denoting the act-divisions but were concerned with letting their readers know that nothing had been omitted at the beginning of the play? And would not the retention of the old "Actus primus. Scaena prima" accomplish this purpose, just as "finis" would indicate that nothing had been left off at the end of a printed production? In other words, the interior act-divisions were of no value to the *reader*; the "Actus primus" was.

From the printed quartos let us turn to productions that have come down to us in MS or in true playhouse form. If the exponents of continuous performances could prove a large number of such compositions to be undivided into acts, then they would have something that approaches an argument. But they cannot prove this. Of a considerable number of MS plays⁷⁶ later than the first permanent theatres in London (1576) only one, it seems, is undivided into acts—*Sir Thomas More*; and the manuscript of this particular production is so abnormal⁷⁷ in various respects as to make it practically valueless in our discussion.

Again, as evidence of how the Elizabethans wrote their plays and how the publishers sometimes ignored the act-divisions of the original, let us take two representatives of the "romantic" writers for the public stage. Daborne's *Christian Turned Turk* was published in 1612 with little or no attempt to divide it into acts; yet the marking off of the first act and the appearance of the chorus in at least two places imply that the acts were denoted in the original MS. And this inference is made practically a certainty when we consider that the MS copy of Daborne's *Poor Man's Comfort* is

⁷⁶ MS plays divided into five acts are: *The Wizard*, Cartwright's *Royal Slave*, Suckling's *Aglaura*, *Dick of Devonshire*, *The Lady Mother*, *Barnavelt*, *Captain Underwit*, *The Distracted Emperor*, *The Captives*, Massinger's *Parliament of Love and Believe as You List*, *The Faithful Friends*, Verney's *Antipo*, *Time's Triumph*, *The Elder Brother*, the Percy plays, *Second Maiden's Tragedy*, *The Game at Chess*, *Timon*, *The Witch*, Shirley's *The General*, *The Honest Man's Fortune*, *The Female Rebellion*. Other MS plays divided into five acts are *Birth of Hercules*, *Misogonus*, *Bugbears*, *Gismond of Salerne*, *Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, *Return from Parnassus*, *Valentius*, *Silecides*, *Club Law*, and various Latin plays. I understand, of course, that this last group of dramas is of little or no value as evidence regarding act-divisions of plays written for the public stages.

⁷⁷ Cf. Greg's introduction to his Ed. of play for Malone Society.

apparently divided into acts,⁷⁸ and that the correspondence of the same author with Henslowe reveals beyond a doubt his usual practice. On June 5, 1613, for example, he wrote to Henslowe that, in order to save time, "an act of ye *Arreignment of london*" had been assigned to Tourneur to write; on July 25 he wrote to the old manager that he had "altered one other sceane in the third act which they have now in parts"; on November 13, speaking of another drama, he says that "ye man was with me whoe found me wrighting the last sceane"; and an undated letter promises to Henslowe "papers to the valew of three acts" of the "Owl."⁷⁹

Again, some of Heywood's plays were printed without act-divisions. One of these was his *If You Know Not Me*. But it will be remembered that Heywood protested vigorously against the careless printing of this production, that the MS of his *Captives* is divided into acts, that he states in the preface to his *Fair Maid of the West* that the story lies plainly before the reader "in acts and scenes," and that he wrote in the Epilogue to his *Brazen Age* (1598):

"He that expects five short acts can contain
Each circumstance of these things we represent," etc.

These cases are sufficient to show that before one can speak with conviction regarding the division of plays into acts, one must go, not to the quartos, but to the author's copy, a playhouse version, or a production carefully printed from one of the sources just mentioned, as for example, the first folio of Beaumont and Fletcher. In the case of Shakspere the best evidence, therefore, for indicating what Shakspere thought of dividing plays into five acts is that contained in the folio of 1623; for, as Pollard has shown, the editors of this volume were in most respects careful and conscientious in their work. And they were interested—let us emphasize this point—not in printing their friend's plays merely to be read as stories, but in getting his productions before the public as drama as well as literature.

When we examine a work got out under such conditions, what do we find? Professor Matthews, as we have seen, informs us that in the "folio of 1623, which seems to be the earliest text derived from Shakspere's own manuscripts, only seventeen out of thirty-seven

⁷⁸ *Anglia*, XXI, 373.

⁷⁹ *Henslowe Papers*, Ed. Greg, pp. 72, 73, 78, 82.

plays are divided into five acts." Now as a matter of fact, out of the thirty-six plays contained in the first folio all but nine are divided into five acts; and of these nine one (*Love's Labour's Lost*) is defective only in that the editors have failed to mark act V; another (*The Shrew*) has "Actus Primus," "Actus Tertia," "Actus Quintus"; and another (*Hamlet*) is divided into acts and scenes until II, 2. Only six plays, then, indicate in any way that Shakspere's manuscripts might not have marked off the acts. Surely one could hardly wish better evidence as to what the folio editors thought of Shakspere's conceiving his plays "in the five-act form"; and in such matters they are better authority than modern exponents of continuous performances.

The six folio plays which show no attempt to mark the acts and scenes deserve brief discussion to show that they are valueless in determining whether Shakspere ignored the five-act form. All of these dramas, as Pollard has shown,⁸⁰ were undivided for the simple reason that the editors, who did not consider them worth so much editorial attention as other plays, were pressed for time when these particular productions were going through the press.

As is generally recognized, *Troilus and Cressida* was secured at the last minute and thrust hastily into the folio; thus not allowing the editors sufficient time to divide it into acts and scenes.⁸¹ As early as 1679 Dryden recognized that the play had been hastily and carelessly printed:

"Shakespeare (as I hinted), in the apprenticeship of his writing modelled it into that play, which is now called by the name of *Troilus and Cressida*, but so lamely is it left to us, that it is not divided into acts: which fault I ascribe to the actors who printed it after Shakespeare's death; and that too so carelessly, that a more uncorrect copy I never saw."⁸²

It is interesting to see what this great classicist thought of Shakspere's conceiving his dramas in the five-act form.

That the failure to divide *Romeo and Juliet* into acts was due to a hasty printing of the undivided quarto of 1609—the basis of the folio text—and not to the fact that the play was undivided in the author's MS or the playhouse version, is made most probable by two facts: (1) the quarto of 1597, probably based on an imperfect

⁸⁰ *Sh. Folios and Quartos*, pp. 124-25.

⁸¹ Lee, *Folio Facsimile*, p. xx, Pollard, p. 116.

⁸² *Essays*, Ed. Ker. I, 203.

report of a performance, is divided into scenes after III, 4; (2) Malone saw a 1599 playhouse version of the drama which was divided into acts with the divisions further marked by music.

Of the remaining folio plays that are undivided (2 and 3 parts of *Henry VI*, *Timon*, *Antony and Cleopatra*) it should be noted that not a single one remained in the repertory of the Globe Company⁸³ as late as 1623; hence it is reasonable to suppose that prompt copies were not at hand to facilitate the division into acts. As Lee and Pollard both point out, the editors apparently placed these dramas purposely into inconspicuous parts of the volume. They probably realized that Shakspere had little to do with the *Henry VI* plays. *Antony and Cleopatra*, says Pollard,⁸⁴ "is so clearly out of place between *Othello* and *Cymbeline* that we must imagine it to have been overlooked and inserted in the only position available at the eleventh hour." The various irregularities of *Timon of Athens*, as J. Q. Adams, Jr., has shown,⁸⁵ are all easily explained by the circumstance that it was hastily thrust into the space originally left for *Troilus and Cressida*. When we take all these facts into consideration, there is no doubt that haste and carelessness, not respect on the editors' part for Shakspere's refusal to adhere to the regulation five-act form, explain the few plays in the folio that are not divided into acts.

There are other reasons for believing that Shakspere, like his contemporaries, conscientiously split his dramas up into the conventional five acts. Mr. William Archer⁸⁶ protests sanely and justly against the misapprehension of those who refuse to have Shakspere "think in acts" and who argue that he "conceived his plays as continuous series of events, without any pause or intermission in their flow." He argues that the act-division was intentionally employed "to give to the action of his plays a rhythm which ought not, in representation, to be obscured or falsified." "So far," he says again, "was Shakspere from ignoring the act-division that it is a question whether his art did not sometimes suffer from the supposed necessity of letting a fourth act intervene between the culmination in the third act and the catastrophe in the fifth."

⁸³ Pollard, pp. 119-20.

⁸⁴ *Folios and Quartos*, p. 125.

⁸⁵ *Journal of Eng. and Germ. Phil.*, VIII, 53-63.

⁸⁶ *Play-making*, pp. 131, 138 n., 143.

As a matter of fact, one can pretty safely make the dogmatic statement that the Horatian dictum of five acts—a dictum that had been made familiar to England through Horace's original, Senecan tragedy, Italian comedy, and various other sources, as for example, Webbe's translation of Georgius Fabricius—was generally accepted as a conventional requisite for drama from 1590, or earlier, to 1642. If quartos undivided into acts are indicative of the general practice of ignoring Horace and writing continuous series of events to be acted without interruptions, how then—to say nothing of the host of Elizabethan plays that are divided into acts and the large amount of evidence given above for act-intermissions—can one explain the large number of casual references of the period which obviously take for granted that dramatists regularly employed the five-act form?

A few illustrations may be cited. Late in the sixteenth century Gosson wrote against the public stage. He titled one of his productions *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*. What point is there to such a title if plays on the regular stage were not consistently cut up into five sections? Mendacio in *Lingua* (V, i) surely has the public stage in mind when he says: "My Lady Lingua is just like one of these lean-witted comedians who, disturbing all to the fifth act, bring down some Mercury or Jupiter in an engine to make all friends." Nassurat in Suckling's *Goblins* (V, 5) speaks of "as strange a turn as if 'twere the fifth act in a play." Killigrew in *The Parson's Wedding* (V, 3) probably had the public stage in mind when he wrote: "Why, just now you spit out one jest stolen from a poor play, that has but two more in five acts." Lovelace in his *On Sanazar's Being Honored* says: "Once a five-knotted whip there was, the stage." The following is quoted primarily because of its close similarity to the poems by Raleigh and Quarles already cited:⁸⁷

"Man's life's a tragedy; his mother's womb,
From which he enters, is the tiring room;
This spacious earth the theatre; and the stage
That country which he lives in; passions, rage,
Folly, and vice are actors; the first cry,
The prologue to the ensuing tragedy;
The former act consisteth of dumb shows;
The second, he to more perfection grows;

⁸⁷ Hannah's Ed. of Raleigh, etc., p. 120.

I' the third he is a man, and doth begin
 To nurture vice, and act the deeds of sin;
 I' the fourth, declines; I' the fifth, diseases clog
 And trouble him; then death's his epilogue."⁸⁸

And finally, it may be remarked that Blount, who got out a dictionary in 1627, wrote under "Tragedy" the following: "Both Comedies and Tragedies ought to have five acts, and no more, according to that of Horace." Other examples of this sort of thing could be cited—various examples have already been given—but these are sufficient for illustration.

Again, if continuous performances were so common in Elizabethan times, then it is somewhat strange, it seems to me, that so many historians, poets, character-writers, moralists, and preachers, as well as playwrights, should casually use the word *act* in pretty much the same theatrical sense that we use the term today. Such references, like those to five acts, are not worth much, to be sure, but they at least imply that, if Elizabethans commonly compiled series of unbroken events and called them dramas, these productions did not make much impression upon the phraseology of a large number of representative men of the period.

If acquaintance with the five-act drama as prescribed by Horace so influenced the terminology of the writers of the period and if undivided productions were so common as undivided quartos, then it seems somewhat odd that we do not find ardent protests against this "romantic" dramatic monstrosity so obviously counter to the dictum of Horace and the practice of the classicists. We hear protests against other "romantic" features. Let us examine one or two of these protests from the point of view of the five-act form. Gayton, writing contemptuously of the Bankside audiences, affirms that such

⁸⁸ For a few of the more interesting among the host of Elizabethan references to the "play of life," etc., which have not been cited above, see: Jonson's *Timber*; Herrick's *Plaudite*; Owen's epigram *Man a Stage-Player*; Fellham's *Resolves*, No. XIII; Heyward's *Edward VI*, p. 303; Wither's introduction to *Abuses Stript and Whipt*; second pt. of *Return from Parnassus*, II, i; Fletcher's *Purple Island*, I, 37; *Elisa*, canto 2; *A pollyonists*, III, 3, 12; *Damon and Pithias* (1571); Epitaph on Burbage; Nash's *Death's Summons*; some six or eight cases in Shakspere; lines preserved by Oldys said to be by Shakspere and Jonson; Ford's *Broken Heart* (III, v); Wm. Fennor's *Descriptions* (1616); *Northward Ho*, I, 2; Jonson's *Farewell to the World*; Middleton's words to Grey prefaced to *Fair Quarrel*; *Game at Chess* (V, 2); conclusion to Heywood's *Apology for Actors*; Davies' *Epigram on Robert Armin*; *Time's Whistle* by R. C.; Heath's *Epigrammes*, No. xvi; Ascham's *Schoolmaster* (Ed. Arber, p. 34); Raleigh's Epitaph on Sidney; Spenser's *Tears of Muses*; *Amoretti*, 54; Whetstone's elegy on Gascoigne; Drummond's *Cypress Grove Walks*; Earl of Essex's device before queen (Nichols, *Progresses*, II, 8). Cf. also Schelling's Ed. of Jonson's *Timber*, p. 121, Variorum *As You Like It*, etc.

a production as *Lingua* is not for their capacity. In comedy they demand such productions as Greene's *Tu Quoque* and *Jack Drums Entertainment*; "or if it be on holy dayes, when saylers, watermen, shoemakers, butchers and apprentices are at leisure, then it is good policy to amaze those violent spirits with some tearing tragedy, full of fights and skirmishes, as *The Guelphs and Guiblins*, *Greeks and Trojans*, or *The Three London Apprentices*, which commonly ends in six acts, the spectators frequently mounting the stage, and making a more bloody catastrophe amongst themselves than the players did."⁸⁹ Certainly this passage indicates that "tearing" tragedies "full of fights and skirmishes" were, as presented by the actors, composed of five acts. Brathwaite objects violently as follows against a certain type of history: "They are like some Comedies wee read now a dayes; The first Act whereof is in Asia, the next in Africa, the third in Europe, the fourth in America; and if Ptolomaeus or Marcus Paulus had found out a fifth part of the World, no question but it had been represented on their uniuersall Stage."⁹⁰ This does not sound as if the most wildly romantic plays were a continuous flow of events. Jonson at the end of the first act of *The Magnetic Lady* has Damplay object to the "protasis or first act" in that nothing is done in it; consequently it is no act. And the boy replies: "But you would have all come together, it seems: the clock should strike five, with the acts." Then comes the dialogue:

"Damplay—Why, if it could do so, it were well, boy.

Boy—Yes, if the nature of a clock were to speak, not strike. So if a child could be born in a play and grow up to a man, in the first scene, before he went off the stage; and then after he come forth a squire, and be made a knight; and that knight to travel between the acts, and do wonders in the Holy Land, or elsewhere; kill Paynimes, wild boars, dun cows and other monsters," etc.

Now it will be noted that, although Damplay objects to such classic features as protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe, he nevertheless insists that something must be concluded in an act, and that the boy's statement that the knight traveled "between the acts" implies that even the exponent of classic ideals realized that the *Four Prentices of London* type of drama had clear-cut act-divisions, if not indeed regular act-intermissions. We have already noted a Restoration classicist objecting to the failure to divide *Troilus and Cressida* into acts, but

⁸⁹ Quoted by Lawrence in *Englische Studien*, 48, p. 218.

⁹⁰ *Survey of History* (1638), p. 240.

it will be remembered that he did not credit Shakspere with this impropriety.

And finally, if the continuous performance was a common attraction of Elizabethan London, it is rather difficult to explain a passage in Massinger's *Roman Actor*. As is well known, plays before private audiences at court and elsewhere frequently occupied considerable time in presentation; and in III, i, of Brome's *Antipodes*, the jealous husband comments on the extreme length of such a performance:

“But it is late, and these long intermissions
By banqueting and Courtship twixt Acts
Will keep backe the Catastrophe of your play,
Untill the morning light.”

Now in *The Roman Actor* (III, 2) Domitia, to prevent such a waste of time, says to the Emperor before whom a play is to be given:

“Sirrah, Caesar,
(I hug myself for 't), I have been instructing
The players how to act; and to cut off
All tedious impertinency, have contracted
The tragedy into one continued scene.”

If tragedies contracted “into one continued scene” were regular occurrences in the London theatres, the words above would have sounded somewhat absurd even in a play dealing with ancient Rome. It is not at all likely that Massinger would have introduced such a dangerous passage into a dignified scene of that play which he ever held to be “the most perfect birth” of his Minerva. To be sure, undivided dramatic “devices” were acted in England. One of these is Middleton and Rowley's *World Tost at Tennis*; but it is interesting to hear what the authors say of this particular production:

“This our device we do not call a play,
Because we break the stage's laws to-day
Of acts and scenes.”

Conclusion. In the preceding pages I have shown the frailty of the arguments advanced by those who advocate that performances unbroken by the “act time” were common in the Elizabethan theatres, and have given sufficient evidence, I believe, to establish the entr'acte, brief though it may have been in some cases, as a regular practice in all the Elizabethan playhouses. We have seen that performances began late enough and continued long enough to explode the idea

that actors in the public theatres were wont to utilize the natural light of London at the expense of inter-act attractions; that the evidence for such inter-act features, especially music, is abundant and convincing for the open playhouses; that quartos undivided into acts are of no value one way or the other in the matter of continuous performances; and that Shakspere, like his contemporaries, in all probability regularly conformed to the conventional five-act form as prescribed by Horace.